

TOWARDS LESBIAN STUDIES IN POLAND

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The role of this article is to present a valid suggestion regarding a respectful and inclusive way of conceptualising contemporary lesbian studies. Although technically based in the Polish social and academic reality, where I am attempting to introduce a pioneering lesbian-studies discourse, I have pursued my scholarly activity mostly abroad. As a consequence, I am very much engaged with the re-investigation of the “Western” rhetoric available to date. A necessarily interdisciplinary character of the project of lesbian studies requires a joint intervention from a number of perspectives, including sociology, geography, philosophy, or feminist epistemologies. The article herein is an overview of my academic activity in this regard, with a special consideration of the intersection between the sociology of sexuality and the geographies of sexualities. By means of a unique interpretation of queer perspective, which serves as a framework for the critique of the discourses to date, the purpose herein is to encourage a new way of conceiving of a plurality of lesbian subjectivities that would eventually translate into full lesbian citizenships across various localities.

Conceptual in nature, the article begins with the clarification regarding my work and methods, and it goes on to introduce the discipline of geography and its role in re-construing gender and sexualities. These two aspects can, then, serve to envision a programme for a new discourse on lesbian studies that would be free from the “Western” mistakes and omissions. With queer in the background, language plays a vital role in the considerations herein; footnotes are, therefore, essential for the meta-analysis and respectfulness that a scholarly work of this character demands.

This article contains an overview of my work in the field of academic lesbian studies. As much as the limited space herein makes it impossible to cover all the many aspects of this enterprise – both in general and when undertaken within the Polish socio-temporal space in particular – it is my objective to present one possible path to introducing a separate scholarly

discourse on non-heterosexual women in Poland. My PhD dissertation¹ is a conceptual reinvestigation and recognition of the multiplicity of lesbian sexualities and identities, its pioneering character manifesting through the lack of local lesbian-studies discourses to date, on the one hand, and the application of queer perspective as a method, on the other. Although a full elaboration on this subject would require additional space, I believe some highlights can, nonetheless, be pointed out. First and foremost – and for the enterprise of mine to be successful – the concept of the *lesbian subject* needs to be looked into in queer terms, so to say. Because my background is queer sociology,² I am quite often asked about how I manage to reconcile the lesbian with the queer and whether these terms are not contradictory. My response remains the same, i.e. it all depends on how one chooses to interpret the term “queer.” If one sees it as an unambiguous and unreflective deconstruction of everything and everyone, then, I agree that there is not much political potential here.³ Instead, I choose to understand *queer as a method and a tool, through which the lesbian would be achieved most effectively*. In fact, I tend to explain to students and academic audiences alike that “queer theory” is not a correct phrasing at all, because “queer” and “theory” are contradictory notions. Traditionally, the purpose of any theory has been to capture a general and universal understanding of a given state of affairs, leading to an explanatory grand scheme.⁴ This, in fact, is everything that queer cannot be. Instead, then, queer should be interpreted as a *perspective*, because it is supposed to tell grassroots stories of various individual experiences of exclusion, and plurality and the uniqueness of these experiences remain at its core. Hence, a perspective – literally understood as “[s]ubjective evaluation of relative significance” and “[t]he ability to perceive

¹ Almost completed and due to submission at the moment of submitting this article.

² I came to consider the “sociology of sexuality” phrasing as somewhat more accurate in the Polish socio-academic space, although there is no official distinction and the choice of mine does not represent the history and internal divisions of a similar differentiation between geographies of sexualities and queer geographies. See Knopp 2007 and Brown 2007 for a basic idea of what the distinction within geography involves.

³ Although this “definition” is much simplified, it is unfortunate that most of the contemporary readings of queer continue along this path. I therefore detach myself from such understanding of queer as – indeed – a theory, and, contrary to more common accounts, I choose not to devote much space to this tendency.

⁴ Although since the 1960s the notion has been explored and re-defined, its traditional meaning remain the default framework. Along these lines, I tend to describe my lesbian-studies explorations in terms of social theory rather than sociological theory, the latter one being the most common – if inaccurate – convention. See Seidman 1991 for a full explanation of the much significant difference.

things in their actual interrelations or comparative importance”⁵— seems to offer a more accurate conceptual framework. Another fine example of how queer can be conceived of and used is, quite simply, through queer studies.⁶

This said, the basic and yet most crucial way in which queer manifests is through language.⁷ Thus, what is characteristic of my lesbian-studies elaborations is that – abiding by the queer method – I use and promote the term “lesbianity” in place of the only available dictionary form “lesbianism.” This is a symbolic measure above all and results from the fact that – as Michel Foucault made it a point to reveal⁸ – the “-ism” ending was invented by the late 19th-century psychiatry and its role was to indicate a problem, a disorder, a pathology or, in the best case, a sin.⁹ I, therefore, choose to subvert this history, as queer does, by conceiving of a more positive and accurate alternative, which is what the “-ity” ending provides.¹⁰ The same situation takes place in my native Polish language, where *lesbianizm* is the only functioning option; I promote *lesbijskość* instead.¹¹ It is, however, of paramount importance to acknowledge that this symbolic gesture of mine is merely a queer way of inviting the lesbian agency contemporarily and it is by no means supposed to offend second-wave feminists, who would very proudly cling to the term “lesbianism” and identify with it. They had very different objectives and agendas back then than mine are today, but their lives, experiences, and self-identifications continue to matter just the same. The queer modification of mine must, therefore, be understood as merely a symbolic upgrade designed to draw attention to how language perpetuates cultural oppressions.

Taking all of this into account, one level where my queer background operates is through a conceptual deconstruction of the lesbian by means of a socio-cultural comment. For this to be done, I would often begin my

⁵ See <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/perspective>.

⁶ And, on a side note, any binary distinction between queer theory and queer studies is a false one and cannot be tolerated, let alone accepted as a valid academic paradigm.

⁷ Which may partly be due to the fact that post-structuralism has been considered one of the roots of queer studies and as such remains its primary expression. The two strands are closely related in that they share the eagerness to *re-construct* cultural contents rather than simply question them.

⁸ See Foucault 1998.

⁹ This, again, is a simplified summation.

¹⁰ I have recently discovered that Tamsin Wilton chose to apply the term “lesbianness” for quite similar reasons. The difference, however, lies in this author’s scepticism towards queer as she rejects what it represented in her times. See Wilton 1995.

¹¹ Linguistically, the Polish “-ość” is the equivalent of the English “-ity” and as such is a neutral ending with more positive connotations than negative ones.

considerations¹² by enumerating the many stereotypes pertaining to lesbian women and break them into parts in order to show how the mechanism of at least double exclusion works in the case of non-heterosexual women, and why the lesbian needs to be culturally excluded in such an elaborate way. For the purposes of this paper, I am going to omit a basic deconstructive section of this kind and re-focus on another aspect of the project instead, namely *the question of lesbian citizenship as explored through the institutional lens*. One important caveat is in order here – I always make it a point to make my work as interdisciplinary as possible, and the paper herein is no exception. The explorations within lesbian studies should always belong to a number of academic perspectives rather than represent a single paradigm, for the question of womanhood itself is by no means one-dimensional as it permeates all personal, social, political, and academic spheres. Therefore, although technically it is the sociology of sexuality I operate within, my work immensely derives from the discipline of geographies of sexualities on the one hand, and feminist epistemologies on the other. It is particularly the geographical lens that reshaped the very core of my research purposes and tools.¹³ I came to proudly represent the academic environment of geography by incorporating its concepts and areas of interest into the local spatial and temporal context; just how significant it is will hopefully become visible soon enough.¹⁴ The question of lesbian citizenship is one place where this interdisciplinary experience manifests.

One aspect of my queer politics of multidimensionality when looking into – and for – the lesbian is recognising the multiplicity of lesbian identities and sexualities when it comes to gender. In this regard, referring to the lesbian per “she” is only conventional. Indeed, my initial idea when enrolling in the PhD programme several years ago was to plan and conduct semi-structured interviews with “biological males”¹⁵ who self-identify as lesbians. While this task would have been by no means impossible, I came to see it as ineffective in introducing lesbian studies in Poland specifically, and, thus, it was my decision to leave it for some later stage of my academic pursuits; to do queer research like that one without first setting the very theoretical bases for the lesbian subject in the Polish academia would, quite simply, make no sense.

¹² Both in the course of academic events like conferences as well as across the pages of publications. See Olasik “Lesbian Ethics Re-Investigated: A Socio-Political Comment” and “Becoming a Lesbian Citizen: A Path of Reflection.”

¹³ See Olasik “Location, Location: Lesbian Performativities That Matter, or Not.”

¹⁴ On a side note, and as will be elaborated on further in the article, no field of geographies of sexualities exists in the Polish institutional context. It poses an extremely valid problem and as such should be subject to a separate analysis.

¹⁵ A problematic notion as well.

The main issue, however, seems to remain the same regardless of the time or space of lesbian-studies pursuits. Namely, who is a lesbian? I continue to be very clear, if radical, about this one: *there should be absolutely no consensus as to what defines a lesbian*. Definitions in this field have resulted in intricate paths of multi-faceted exclusions for decades, this being particularly visible within feminist discourses on the one hand and the so-called lesbian communities on the other. Of course, it is clear that moments of “strategic essentialism”¹⁶ are advisable in politics and public life, because it is not necessarily desirable to explain to a prime minister of a given country what a *queer* lesbian is, but other than these very tangible political moments, the social and academic preoccupation with the lesbian identity – that is fixed by definition – should stop, for it reproduces and reinforces the profile of a lesbian whereby she embodies the stereotype-driven image of false – or, more to the point, failed – womanhood.¹⁷ I tend to conceptualise this matter in terms of the object-*abject* continuum, where the timeless cultural process of objectification of women has additionally been reinforced by Julia Kristeva’s *abject*-ification.¹⁸ This clarified, and to escape the position of lesbianity as that of either the object or the *abject*, I daresay that lesbian identity should give way to the exploration of lesbian *subjectivity* instead. I firmly differentiate between these two in that, unlike the socially fixed and academically exploited notion of identity, subjectivity is about *actively taking control over the process of one’s own auto-creation and self-understanding*. A fine expression of lesbian subjectivity will be when the statement, “[Y]ou are a lesbian if you say you are (at least to yourself)” (Faderman 36). becomes the only social parameter in ascertaining one’s emotional and sexual life. Although much simplified, this stage is preliminary to considering the matter of citizenship.

The fundamental question for contemporary lesbian praxis – one that I had already asked¹⁹ – is, who is a lesbian *citizen* and where is (s)he? Although it may not seem so at first, this query is much different from the one raised above. With the latter one it is inevitable to enter the already mentioned field of geographies of sexualities. Considerations of the

¹⁶ See Browne and Nash 2009: 187.

¹⁷ It is in this context that, as already stated, I usually begin my considerations with the deconstruction of stereotypes as items restricting the understanding of the so-called “true femininity” by protecting its heterosexual character. See Olasik “Lesbian Ethics Re-Investigated: A Socio-Political Comment.”

¹⁸ Kristeva’s “*abject*” is something miserable, despicable and without dignity, and as such goes beyond objectification and needs to be socially rejected. Using this rhetorics, Judith Butler called lesbians “an elaborate form of *abjects*.” See Kristeva 1982, Butler 1990 respectively.

¹⁹ See Olasik “Becoming a Lesbian Citizen: A Path of Reflection.”

disciplinary aspect of the matter aside, it is essential to provide a brief overview of the theme of citizenship. The notion traditionally relies on the exclusion of womanhood, for the only way a woman could be a citizen is through motherhood, but even then she can enjoy social benefits for the price of her body being socially controlled and/or exploited. Also, worth noting is the fact that even this dimension of female citizenship is not everywhere the case.²⁰ Although this, again, is a much simplified explanation, the question of citizenship is, of course, even more complex for the lesbian subject. In the 1980s and 1990s, some geographers dared to pose questions about sexuality and erotic desire – questions that were quite inconvenient for the mainstream of their environment, whose education and research had nothing to do with such issues. Parallel to this line of enquiry, the concept of sexual citizenship was eventually suggested by a sociologist, David T. Evans, in his 1993 classic titled *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities*. Considered a classic in several subfields within geography, the author may be responsible for the most natural intersection that has occurred between sociology and geography to date. A very popular notion since, sexual citizenship flourished mostly within the subdiscipline of geographies of sexualities that emerged around that time. The purpose now, as one of the key figures of the field put it, was “to demonstrate how citizens are normatively constructed as (hetero)sexual subjects and, related to this, offer a way of analysing the resultant inequalities faced by ‘excluded’ citizens in terms of the institutionalization of heterosexuality” (Richardson 257). Thus, authors actually began to consider *non-heterosexual* people as citizens in scholarly, analytical, and social terms. Along similar lines, other areas of interest came under scrutiny with regard to the role in maintaining sexual citizenship, e.g. the market, economics, or the private/public divide. Indeed, not only would it be hard to recount the history and dissemination of these disciplines here, but it would also be diminishing for the actual immensity of those increasingly overlapping intra- and inter-disciplinary enterprises. Suffice it so say that this might have been the finest time of gender and sexuality as analytical notions, with newly-emergent sociologists of sexuality speaking of “intimate citizenship”²¹ or “moments of citizenship.”²² It became clear that, as Sally Munt writes, “[I]dentities are produced, expressed and authenticated by and through space” (174). With space and time being complex notions central to geographical endeavours, it was now natural for geographers of sexualities to

²⁰ Which is one of the focal points within the discipline of social geography contemporarily.

²¹ See Plummer 1995.

²² See Weeks 1995.

investigate how these work in the case of lesbians and gay men specifically as they attempt at organising themselves across various spatialities.

All this said, geographers of sexualities have traditionally been quite essentialist in how they explored the ways in which identities are enacted, allowed for or/and forbidden. They failed to problematise sexual categories at all, so, not surprisingly, these elaborations involved quite a fixed and limited understanding of the notion “gay.” This coupled with the fact that the “gay and lesbian” phrase – or the LGBT acronym, for that matter – is an impossible enterprise on the one hand and another male-dominated space on the other, lesbian women were hardly represented in those enquiries. It turned out that the gender of geography had been very masculine – possibly even more so than that of sociology – and, as a consequence, the field was still quite deprived of a strong lesbian component. Since, again, it is not my objective to describe the chronology of those intra-disciplinary events, suffice it to say that *feminist* geographers came along to aid this issue as they took up the question of gender,²³ while in the late 1990s *queer* geographies emerged with a more inclusive agenda that continues to develop to this day. With a bit of a postmodern touch, so to say, they exist in order to properly emphasise “the lived experience of sexual dissidents” by “includ[ing] a greater critical awareness of the material conditions for the production of ‘knowledge’ about sexuality” (Bell and Binnie 224). In this respect the sub-discipline has come to be preoccupied with all sorts of sexual desires, trans experiences, queer bodies, cyberspaces, and the heteropatriarchal system in general. Again – while the exact timeframes and peculiarities are not too significant for the purposes of the article herein, it is crucial to be aware of how complex geography actually is as a result of those disseminations. I apologise for any oversimplification; the brief introduction to the discipline I have just offered certainly does not do justice to the multi-facetedness of the phenomenon. Worth noting is also the localised and particular character of the discipline within the academia. Namely, the whole dissemination within geography originates from the British context and is representative of it, with both feminist geography and later geographies of sexualities being part of a broader field of human geography, which also encompasses social geography. Geographies of sexualities emerged as a sub-discipline here. Meanwhile, broad and fundamental as the field is, human geography does not exist at universities in Poland. Not surprisingly, then, no institution in the Polish space has taken up geography of sexuality. As I have mentioned elsewhere,²⁴ a fine summation of the status of research into sexualities within geography is

²³ See WGSF 1997 and Laurie et al. 1999 for classic texts of that thought.

²⁴ This whole point has been elaborated on in my PhD dissertation.

offered by the key authors of this discipline, who say, “Most work by sexual geographers is still located within the broader subdiscipline of social and cultural geography. [...] There are also those who could be defined as ‘sexual geographers’ who do not work within the discipline of geography” (Browne, Lim, and Brown 5). I am proud to fall into this latter category.

All this clarified, with rather essentialist and man-centred attitudes to sexuality offered by the mainstream of early geographers of sexualities,²⁵ it was only natural that lesbian geographies should emerge. Dealing with how non-heterosexual women organise their desires and identifications across urban and rural spaces, this relatively new²⁶ sub-discipline can be part of both geographies of sexualities or queer geographies, which usually depends on the framework and objectives. What is crucial is that the lesbian has finally been recognised as a “partial or unjust citizen” of various localities and geotemporal realities (Richardson 263). It is in this context that my academic activity can be situated.

In the course of my first encounter with the discipline of geographies of sexualities, I was told a particularly important thing about the nature of all academic pursuits in general and sexuality-profiled ones in particular. I was made aware of the fact that *what you talk about always depends on where you talk about it*.²⁷ As I tend to explain, lesbian subjectivity here in Poland will be quite different than it is in pluralist France or in South Africa, where corrective rapes done to lesbians by male family members are still very common and not recognised by the law. Then, of course, there are urban areas and rural areas and any research in sexualities – as well as any consideration of lesbian studies – needs to take these into account.²⁸ This said, though one of my objectives has been to lesbianise space²⁹ in Poland, the concepts I have been pursuing and developing are much relevant to the already established

²⁵ For it should be acknowledged that the subfield has by no means ran out of potential; new approach has been adopted and the discipline is now more self-reflective and inclusive, and continues to problematise the notion of sexuality. See Bell and Binnie 2000 as well as Browne, Lim and Brown 2007 for classic works of this character.

²⁶ New compared to the already existing sub-fields at that time. First representatives of lesbian geographies appeared around the year 1993. The two most renowned representatives include Gill Valentine and Diane Richardson.

²⁷ I continue to express my thanks to Kath Browne for the profound change in my academic profile that these words resulted in back then.

²⁸ Another interesting and common research subject in this context includes the migration of sexual ‘dissidents’.

²⁹ A direct reference to Sally Munt when she speaks of her own “lesbianizing of space” (Munt 173, spelling original).

lesbian-studies programmes in the so-called “West.”³⁰ For this instance, the notion of womanhood and femininity needs to be continually problematised regardless of a locality in order for our culture circle to get *unstuck* regarding the arbitrary gender divisions. Therefore, a sociological analysis of why *femininity is merely an idea rather than an actual identity* ought to be an essential point of departure for any lesbian-studies programme regardless of the geo-spatial reality. Since, unfortunately, a lesbian will culturally always be a woman first – her own self-identification notwithstanding – and only then non-heterosexual, a re-construction of lesbianity is necessary for dismantling the supplementary role that the “Western” world created for her.

All this said, in my pursuit of a separate academic discourse of lesbian studies in Poland, I am interested in how space is confined and misused with regards to lesbian subjects, as well as how to open spaces of various kinds that would be specifically lesbian. Above all, however, I investigate how the lesbian in annihilated and pathologised so that it can remain at a disadvantaged and invisibilised cultural position. As already clarified, my point of departure is queer perspective, which enables *the creation of a powerful lesbian possibility and the recognition of lesbian multiplicity*. All in all, it would also have to be an educational project that would reveal the relevant cultural mechanisms on the one hand and envision *lesbianity as a space, an energy or an attitude that can potentially be inhabited and explored by any person regardless of the actual sexual component*.³¹ The queer dimension would be also to include lesbian story-telling as opposed to truth-telling, because truth has always been a political and contingent notion, and for this reason the so-called “scientific objectivity” cannot be relied on, for it is a tool of heteropatriarchal matrix for conveying selected contents to the mass. This, however, is an entirely different subject – one, whose immensity deserves a separate analysis. Ultimately what is hoped for is lesbian visibility, which is not a straightforward concept at all. One of my favourite quotes in this context is, “Visibility is a tricky thing. Is someone visible when you can point her out in the crowd, or when you understand what her life feels like?” (D’Erasmio qtd. in Heller 67).

³⁰ Although this article does not focus on queer approach to language, I always make it a point to mark these common and allegedly explanatory categories as random and contingent. Their sole role is to maintain the artificially-constructed binary character of the world accessible to us, with one part of the dualism always superior to the other. Other examples include heterosexual-homosexual, man-woman, white-black, civilised-uncivilised, etc. “West” and “East” are perhaps the most arrogant situations ever created. I therefore tend to use these categories only conventionally for the purposes of successful communication, placing them in single quotation marks as a way of my subverting their harmful character.

³¹ For comparison see Adrienne Rich’s notion of “lesbian continuum” (1980).

A question remains about how to do lesbian studies and how different this is from the already existing programmes and paradigms. It is a well-known fact that gay liberation throughout a number of decades failed to represent lesbian meanings. While male domination within those environments already provides an explanation of this state of affairs, it is also crucial to realise that the mechanism of discrimination and exclusion that non-heterosexual women experience is much different from that of gay men's. Gay movements aside, then, the history of feminisms also shows a particularly acute insensitivity to the question of lesbianity, which remains a controversial issue to date. It is vital to acknowledge that there is – and never has been – *one* feminism; it was never a homogenous movement even within a single wave. This said, what I call the mainstream of feminisms has always been very much erotophobic and homophobic, these including so-called lesbophobia, biphobia, and transphobia all the same. Though another oversimplification must follow here,³² for it is impossible to recount a full history of those tendencies across these pages – nor is the purpose – suffice it to say that lesbian women within mainstream feminist movements have been considered the “Lavender Menace.”³³ Why I am using present tense specifically is that even though the hostility of that era seems to have passed, it is too easily replaced with silence. Due to historical and social circumstances connected with the rise of communism, and contrary to many an opinion, *Poland has never seen consecutive waves of feminism* in the first place, much less a diversification of the current feminist tendencies. The public has been broadly familiar with always the same three or four feminist figures, who are referred to as radical even though their agendas have never gone beyond what is usually considered the liberal feminist interest, for all they seem to have been concerned with over last two decades is the equality and visibility of women in public and political spheres. In this light it is unsurprising, though still unfortunate, that *a separate lesbian component has not been established*. Crucially, it was within lesbian feminism that heterosexual matrix and marriage as a compulsory institution were first acknowledged in the “Western” context, which is one of the reasons why lesbian feminism and separatism of the 1980s resulted in what I call *the greatest era of lesbian*

³² e.g. I am forced to disregard alterations and differences between the consecutive waves and movements. Suffice it to say that the most typical differentiation covers the liberal feminisms, radical feminisms, cultural feminisms, material feminisms. There is no simple chronology here as these strands overlapped. Generally speaking, lesbian feminism followed as an extension of cultural/radical feminisms on the one hand and a reaction to all available feminisms back then, particularly the liberal movement that outraged many.

³³ As (in)famously termed by Betty Friedan during one of the National Organisation for Women meetings in 1969.

visibility and productivity. Poland has not shared that experience, which, as I will further point out, has both advantages and disadvantages.

The role of feminisms clarified – albeit in a limited way – it is now essential to justify the existence of academic lesbian studies specifically. Many gender studies and women's studies departments³⁴ at universities were created as early as 1990 and gradually introduced all over the world – Poland included – but I remain doubtful about their purposes and the potential for investigating non-heterosexual femininity. With a new academic year approaching last year,³⁵ I randomly looked up current gender studies programmes in Poland, France and the USA alike. Even a brief look at them provoked one question in particular – *how do you do studies on gender without a serious mention and consideration of sexuality?* Because, frankly speaking, there is none, for the overwhelming amount of time is taken up by theories of feminist histories, philosophies, theologies, law, or biographies. Gender does not seem to be an analytical notion at all, which is unreasonable enough, for not only is the question of masculinity and its harmful consequences for contemporary men equally essential,³⁶ but the construction of femininity in the first place does not seem to be covered, too. As a result, these programmes appear to be very one-dimensional and far from interdisciplinary, and do not accomplish their purpose. With this attitude towards gender, it is hardly surprising that sexually is much less common component, while the answer to that earlier question of mine should be – *you do not*. Even if the sociology of gender were properly added, it would not be sufficient, for it is a myth that gender is that analytical notion that feminists should worry about, while sexuality studies or queer studies are what gay people are concerned with. *It is inappropriate and substantially incorrect to do one without the other, because gender and sexuality were designed to complement each other and as such they are inextricably linked. Gender is designed in order for sexual desire to be justified, so any mention of one without the other does not explain, much less dismantle, the cultural programmes and mechanisms behind our identities.* Due to the fact that the majority of gender studies all over the world have been constructed around the mainstream “Western” feminist ideals of the 1980s, they will be deprived of the sexual component by default. The point is, then, that gender studies need serious revising, since the way they are today shows how *not to do*

³⁴ The difference between these two being very unclear and problematic.

³⁵ i.e. the academic year 2016/2017. An academic year in Poland always begins in October and ends mid-July.

³⁶ Fortunately, a separate body of masculinity studies do seem to appear in university programmes more and more often.

lesbian studies, for there can be no lesbian citizenship as long as one focuses on a single dimension of gender *or* sexuality. Not only is it of paramount importance to look into both at the same time, but it is necessary to investigate them in detail. This said, I am perfectly aware of the fact that gender studies are not supposed to be lesbian studies, but, first, the point was to demonstrate how female non-heterosexual sexuality has never had academic space within what is often considered the most woman-friendly environment. Second, these two do not really work separately. It is therefore my hope that new, *proper* lesbian studies can emerge and constitute a necessarily interdisciplinary project that would lead to the lesbian presence and visibility within the academia and the society – whichever that would be – alike.

Within these new lesbian studies, sociology of gender and sexuality would have to be of paramount importance. It is hard to imagine a lesbian-studies programme that would not begin with a sociological deconstruction of cultural mechanisms that I had mentioned.³⁷ Other than this, however, there are many themes to be taken into account for a lesbian subject to emerge. While it might be harder for European universities to engage with human rights debates due to the lack of the US-specific history of minority movements on both social and legal planes,³⁸ these should nonetheless be taught as they encourage attempts at finding specifically local means of emancipation in place of unreflective emulating the US ways.³⁹ One framework worth considering in European contexts is that of post-colonialism; it is through post-colonial studies – perhaps coupled with basic ideas of anthropology – that comparative analyses can be offered to the “Western” audiences regarding the construction of what we here tend to call lesbian identities and womanhood. Close to feminist discourses on the one hand⁴⁰ and cultural studies on the other, this could turn out revealing for how

³⁷ While it is not a requirement that all lesbian-studies programmes should be as openly queer as my pursuits are, I nonetheless consider this framework a default one, for it is impossible to reconstruct a subjectivity without first revealing its cultural roots and meanings, which is what queer embodies.

³⁸ I am alluding to the history of the US civil rights movement or anti-war movements, whose experience facilitated non-heterosexual and feminist strategies.

³⁹ It is a common mistake to generalise the US experience and apply it to the current interests worldwide. These attempts are absurd, futile, and harmful, as they fail to consider specifically local historical and social conditionings. One example is a discourse of three waves of feminisms in Poland that could allegedly take place within twenty years of the country's independence even though it took a century in the USA. This kind of discourse is, first, untrue, and, second, conceptually impossible.

⁴⁰ In fact, it can be considered obligatory to use bell hooks as a point of departure here, which would engage with the problematic character of white feminist ideals at the same time.

it is that we perceive our own identities both in relation to the self and to what we came to call as the other. The de-construction of these is then vital. It would then be logical to look at literary studies, where the lesbian is said to belong naturally, for it has always been through the written word that non-heterosexual women in the “West” engage with the ubiquitously oppressive surroundings. It is in this context that, as Tamsin Wilton put it, “This lesbian is a textual creature” (133, emphasis original). A lot has already been said about the engagement of women with the printed word, with the earliest record of non-heterosexual desires from the era before “a lesbian” was invented – so to say – to the relatively recent feminist critical analyses regarding the femaleness of texts.⁴¹ Literary criticism has focused on the identification and appropriation of womanhood on the one hand – both regarding the author and the reader – and the recovery of the past by reclaiming authors’ identities on the other. In this context, and as Wilton again asks, “[I]s the dyke’s *Orlando* a different book from the homophobe’s *Orlando*, and how is that difference significant?” (118), where the latter one is exemplified by any reading of the classic volume that simply erases the question of Virginia Woolf’s biography and sexuality, whatever that would actually be.⁴² Literary studies is a fascinating field, whose research material can be easily incorporated into any lesbian-studies programme, for it allows for the engagement with non-Western authors, whose texts and identities have often been erased intentionally. However, its immensity and attractiveness should be captured in a thoughtful way so that not to discredit other lesbian-studies components that should take an equal amount of space.⁴³ Then, I believe there should be place for a variation of lesbian art, or transgressive female artistic initiatives at the very least.⁴⁴ It is also significant to touch on linguistics and reveal how women in general, and non-heterosexual women in particular, have lacked the means within language to express their identities, desires, and futures. An analysis of language pertaining to sexual practices of both gay men and gay women could make for a good start, but it would obviously have to encourage a meta-reflection regarding the superiority of the English language over other forms; perhaps a comparative analysis would be in order here. As far as the humanities are concerned, both geography and philosophy are important in the context

⁴¹ e.g. Hélène Cixous’ *écriture féminine*. See Cixous et al. 1976.

⁴² It should never be the purpose to cross the border of autonomy by the practice of *identifying* the author for them; it is rather necessary to acknowledge their own self-expressions.

⁴³ All this with the assumption that a university lesbian-studies course or programme will last no more than one or two terms.

⁴⁴ For, again, it is not exactly the point to define what lesbian art is.

herein, but they deserve a separate elaboration, for lesbian studies should be geographical and philosophical by default rather than merely incorporate these into a programme. It is perhaps equally vital that as much as sociology ought to serve as a starting point, the social-sciences dimension should also be visible in how psychology can be covered. This discipline is particularly problematic for any minority studies discourse in general, and non-heterosexual movements in particular, for it was psychiatry of the 19th century that invented the three rigid sexual categories in the first place, two of which has been labelled in derogatory terms. Contemporary psychology and psychiatry students continue to be taught about the classification and “correctness” of sexuality more often than they are encouraged to acknowledge its fluidity, which has dramatic consequences for the way societies are, since it is psychologists – not sociologists of sexuality – that regular people come to for an explanation regarding own desires. An urgent intervention is therefore necessary into how much authority psychology gains nowadays and what this “expert knowledge”⁴⁵ constitutes. This said, it is not only the humanities or the social sciences that have much to offer to contemporary lesbian studies; it is equally important to look at how womanhood has been constructed in science, meaning the so-called exact sciences. One fine example is the case of Vera Rubin, a leading astrophysicist who, despite enormous achievements, struggled with sexism more than with scientific questions.⁴⁶

The above-mentioned list is by no means exhaustive. It has merely been constructed by me to point out that *any of these fields and sub-disciplines needs to be seen through the lesbian lens and the ‘here and now’ context in order for the lesbian to be able to inhabit new dimensions*. As to prospective problems that could emerge in realising the potential of an academic faculty of lesbian studies – there always be some. For instance, a question arises about who could run a course like this and on what basis? And who can attend? A standard concern will surely be whether a “biological male” can teach lesbian-studies stuff, no matter how qualified and what that qualification actually means. The queer perspective I represent allows for an escape from this type of classification at least to some extent. One concern that should not be easily dismissed, however, pertains to the content and methodology of a course like this under scrutiny. Namely, *capturing the lesbian in terms of another object of research should be avoided at all costs*. It has been a way of traditional anthropology to objectify groups in order to

⁴⁵ See Giddens 1990.

⁴⁶ See <https://qz.com/873189/vera-rubin-the-scientist-who-discovered-dark-matter/> for a full story.

describe their properties externally. The sociology of deviance in the USA of the 1950s is an infamous example of that tradition and shows what harm it can do regarding social discourses; within this field gay and lesbian “subcultures” alike would be studied in terms of gang groups, with the researcher doing everything in his⁴⁷ linguistic power to depict them as the dangerous other. This aside, a lesbian-studies enterprise is also bound to spark debates over the definitions of lesbian women and lesbian contents. As I said before, to a very limited extent strategic essentialism is necessary, but not so much when it comes to a real person exploring their own sexual and emotional possibilities, because they will always get dragged into a norm. Interdisciplinary “coalitional politics”⁴⁸ among lesbian subjects and social educational initiatives will therefore be far more effective and should be considered a starting point. This said, there are many more components to be taken into account and resolved, but this should be done from a localised perspective rather than a generalised point of view.

Back to the fundamental question I posed earlier in this article, it is only through a conscious selection and distribution of educational contents that lesbian citizenship can be conceived of, assumed, and performed. In this context, a lesbian citizen would be. Again, a rigid and one-dimension definition is unwelcome, but *a lesbian citizen would be a fulfilled lesbian subject – neither an object nor an abject – whose lived experience would be based on conscious choices regarding one’s own gender/sex/behavioural/visual traits*. It is in this manner that one can become *actively involved in the project of Self by re-creating own sexual and emotional ethics*. This, however, is not supposed to be a restrictive concept, but an open field of possibilities instead, and as such should be properly developed and elaborated on.⁴⁹ While essential for any geo-temporal contexts, histories, and circumstances, lesbian citizenship is also always dependent on these, which is what makes the relationship symbiotic. It is my hope that the multiplicity of new projects of contemporary lesbian studies will emerge in order to accommodate for that need to understand and assume what has been termed “the other” on the one hand, and to develop and enhance the already existing lesbianities on the other.

⁴⁷ These were men almost exclusively.

⁴⁸ Which Judith Butler defines as “a set of dialogic encounters” (Butler 19-20).

⁴⁹ In fact, my own understanding of this notion is constantly evolving. See Olasik “Becoming a Lesbian Citizen: A Path of Reflection” for its earlier version.

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